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Craig ideas, and it has the finest modern scenic equipment, including a sky-dome. But its repertory thus far is rather conservative.

Mrs. Laura Sherry has been adventurous with the Wisconsin Players, giving this year *Carlos Among the Candles* and another by Wallace Stevens in both Wisconsin and New York. Aline Barnsdall has tried some interesting experiments in Los Angeles. Thomas Wood Stevens, formerly of Chicago, has now a great opportunity as director of the Dramatic Arts Department of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, but a few plays by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman are the only modern experiments he has tried thus far. Baltimore, Duluth, Boston, even Philadelphia, also certain universities, are contributing more or less to the movement —it is impossible even to mention all the little companies and clubs. Let the good work go on. *H. M.*

AMERICAN VERSE AND ENGLISH CRITICS

I wish English critics who discuss American poetry would provide themselves with the evidence. Mr. Edward Garnett, in his *Critical Notes on American Poetry* published in the *Atlantic,* makes no mention of Carl Sandburg or Vachel Lindsay, and his estimate of Ezra Pound's work is based on juvenilia—nothing later than 1911, though Mr. Pound's work is published on the other side and might easily have been obtained. Mr. Garnett has "been told" that "he is at his best in his translations from the Chinese." And with this casual remark, he rests his case against Mr. Pound.

It would not be so bad if the English critics—Mr. Garnett is not the first of them—told us something new, something that we do not already know, or if their grasp of the subject were equal to their willingness to take long-range shots—without the assistance of a range-finder. But the chief impression gained from Mr. Garnett's article is that he is uninformed, or that he has been misinformed by mis-representative guide-books such as Mr. Braithwaite's *Annual Anthology of Magazine Verse* and kindred blue-books. He says some interesting things, some vital things, in connection with the poetry of what he calls the transition period following Whitman, and it is to this period that his criticism belongs. He has hardly progressed beyond it. It tempers, one feels, his reactions to contemporary American poetry.

The fact is that English critics have not glimpsed the direction in which American poetry is moving. It is creating a new diction, a new idiom, and it is going to be a much more fluid thing than they have any idea of. It is on the score of diction that the American poets are said chiefly to err, and it is on this very score that they are going to move away from their critics. Carl Sandburg uses the English language as if it were a new instrument. Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters are not writing poems that will stack up with some already conceived model of good style or social form in English verse, but poetry that will fit and respond to the conditions of their own life and place.

When Mr. Garnett says that the American poets lack distinction of style, is he not thinking of a style with which

he is already familiar? And when he says that they lack "literary *humus,*" must not the emphasis be placed upon "literary?"

Never, I think, have the American poets been so securely rooted in their native soil. If one examines an anthology of contemporary English poetry, the *Annual of New Poetry* recommended by Mr. Garnett, one finds a prevailing note of withdrawal, or of remoteness from the concerns of contemporary life. And this precisely is what is not characteristic of contemporary American poetry. Our most distinctive verse is at present so much concerned with American life and so much a part of it that it may be said to be becoming genuinely national—something that one does not find true of English poetry today; for what is national in contemporary English poetry is not of today but of a century or more ago. Whatever enrichment English poetry has had lately has been from outside sources, not from within. One does not feel the lack of "literary *humus*" in English poetry, but one feels sometimes that the soil is a little weary, a little sterile, from having been so many times reworked without sufficient nutriment from life.

Of course what Mr. Garnett says of the adulterate literary style of the vast majority contemporary with Whitman—and a vast majority today—is true; the combination of a borrowed literary style imported from England, and the native image, is incongruous. But, and this Mr. Garnett does not see, it is the native image that is going to win out, the native image that we are beginning to treasure. That

is why our poetry is now, for the first time, beginning to have roots.

Mr. Garnett begins his article with a very curious premise, the premise that "English poets inherit advantages denied their American brothers." He says:

> The English literary soil has been fructified by the germs of poetic associations since the days of Chaucer. Indeed, not only were the Elizabethans inspired by the riches of the mediaeval world and the Renaissance, but elements of the rich compost of the buried civilizations carried into Britain by the invading Celts, Romans, and Teutonic tribes reappear in the literary magic of Shakespearian drama.

Just why this literary inheritance belongs exclusively to the English poet and not to his American brother—who lives in the backwoods and still has hand-to-hand encounters with painted savages, yet also possesses a few books—is not explained.

It is not because of a lack of background that the American poet differs from his English contemporary. Why should not the American scene and many generations of American life tend to change one's reactions to the historic literary background? When have backgrounds remained static and not receded from the middle to a possibly remote distance? Yet whenever a poet or a critic boldly emphasizes a new middle distance, say, at the expense of one that has been pushed further back, it is commonly assumed that that poet or critic has no background. It is much easier to find fault with a critic on this score than on the score of failing to appreciate the thing that is pushing back the middle distance and creating a new foreground. Thus I have had to suffer recently the implication of having no background because not suffi-

ciently responsive to the literary appeal of Ralph Hodgson's poems. Yet neither of the two critics who publicly upbraided me has noted the *negative* quality of Mr. Garnett's criticism of American poetry. If my reaction to English poetry is so obviously tempered by provincialism and a supposed dullness of response to the beauty of rhyme and all that is classic in English verse, why not expose the unexpansive narrowness of Mr. Garnett's vision of American poetry?

It is not that the American poet can not write like his English contemporary, but that he does not want to. It is not that one does not recognize the excellence of an achieved literary style, but that one may be more interested in a more poignant reality.

Mr. Garnett devotes more attention to the faults of Mr. Masters' least successful, obviously early, poems than he does to an appraisal of the highly original quality of the best poems in his later books. He is more interested in calling attention to certain tedious unnecessary lines in some of these poems than in proclaiming the new drift of ore. But if one turns from these to the poems of Mr. W. W. Gibson, in the recommended *Annual of New Poetry,* in which we find not only lines but whole poems that are tedious and unnecessary, and in which one looks in vain for that distinction of style said to be lacking in American poetry, what must one think of Mr. Garnett's comparative criticism?

And what, we may ask ourselves, is the value of criticism which tells us all that we already know of the faults of American verse but does not approximate any true under-

standing of its unique features? If it tells us merely that American verse is different from English verse and therefore poor, can we believe it? If it tells us, after a due consideration of *all* the evidence, that American verse has not yet achieved its ideal or attained quite clearly to a full perception of its direction, then we may begin to listen to it. But the English critics have not looked for any direction. They have thought of Whitman as an isolated phenomenon, and have only recognized as his successors those who have borrowed his clothing and who are not really his successors at all. Unless one recognizes the new, autochthonic note in American poetry today, in the most distinctive American poetry that is, one realizes nothing of the subtle impulses and forces that are at work to create a new poetic environment for the coming generation. And if one fails to recognize this, one might just as well not write about American poetry at all. *A. C. H.*

ON BEING REVIEWED

I was recently asked to review a book. I must confess this the highest compliment I ever attained to. Reviewing a book presupposes with the average American mind a clear eminence in the personality of the critic I don't possess. He stands above the book and the hypothetical public between which and the author he suspends his opinion. Naturally, I declined the invitation.

Had my friend asked me to have the book review me, this apologia would not exist. To be reviewed by a poem,